

Bristling

Not a second skin
but some stiff layer right along the skin
about half an inch out.
Brittle, separate. Made of hostility.
So that I just miss
slamming drawers on your fingers,
sloshing boiling water on you.
And my words without trying without
intent hit and cut and immediately
are guilty.

And cut guilt
back into me, barbed and ugly.
Blood in every thought, bile in every
word, death and darkness hissing
in the thin space between self and skin.

And because you are there you are
the target, the magnet, getting hit
or nearly hit, the close calls a hidden
fantasy of revenge turned inward.

You do not know how many ways I have
cut smashed crashed and blinded you,
blinded myself with the twisted barbs
turned in, turned out, a hair shirt
facing both ways, bristling.

ANNE LE DRESSAY